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## MAKE KITH NOT KIN!

BIOPOLITICS, GENERICSCIENCE, MASHINES ANTHROPOCENE, CAPITALOCENE, CHTHULUCENE, CYBORG, HARAWAY

When my daughter was little, we played a game on the way to her preschool called Count the Dog Poo. It was a game about counting, as you would play with any child, but also a game for a little New Yorker, to teach her to watch where she steps. Living in New York, pretty much every day one can expect the pleasure of watching shit extrude out of a dog's asshole. Hence it is with a certain amusement that I learn from reading *Manifestly Haraway* (Minnesota 2016) that in California, Donna Haraway picks up her dogs' poo with the blue plastic wrapper of the *New York Times*.

Besides a different relation to dogs, I find there's many ways my sensibility differs in interesting ways from Donna Haraway. She describes herself as a "Sputnik Catholic." (283) While raised religious, she says, "My Catholic girl's brain got educated, as opposed to my being a pro-Life activist mother of ten, because I became a national resource after Sputnik. My brain got valuable..." (283) I think I might describe myself as a Mercury Marxist. (While it is the Apollo rather than the Mercury space program that I remember, that's the wrong god.) There's something in agonistic rivalry of the cold war space race about the possibilities of the human to become something else.

Being a secular Protestant to Haraway's secular Catholic, I'm a bit less interested in mediating figures. The naked confrontation with the problem of totality is the thing I take to be what endures from the Protestant sensibility. Devotion to one's labors was not supposed to be an end in itself, but rather a means to make bodies comfortable enough to open toward the sheer sublime alien otherness of the world.

So I read Haraway's writing from a location a little askew to some of its topics. And that's what makes it interesting. *Manifestly Haraway* offers three moments from her evolving work. It takes the form of three meditations on the manifesto. The book reprints the famous 'Manifesto for Cyborgs' (originally 1985), the 'Companion Species Manifesto' (2003) and a fresh conversation with Cary Wolfe that can be read as notes for a 'Cthulucene Manifesto'. I want to read these starting from the most recent, working backwards.

The impulse to rename the Anthropocene something else – anything else – is a powerful one and perhaps even its own pathology. For a humanist, there's every reason not to want to be centered again on *Anthropos*, after spending so long trying to decenter him. But it was biologists and earth scientists who named it, and it might sustain ongoing conversations to respect that.

Haraway: "I wish that it hadn't been their term. But it is their term... We will need to continue to operate within this discursive materiality as well as others that name our urgencies better in key respects." (242-3) Its helpful to be able to speak with the natural sciences in language that plays there.

In any case, as Haraway says, "I don't have to choose one term." If she did, it might with Jason Moore call this the *Capitalocene*: "the players in Capitalocene are, at a minimum, situated plants, animals, humans, microbes, the multiple layering of technologies in and among all this." (240) It's a way of naming that identifies a power at work in climate change, ocean acidification, mass extinction and other signs of living and dying very poorly. My only hesitation about the name is that were capitalism to be abolished tomorrow, nothing is really solved by that mere negation.

So let's think through another name. Let's live also in the *Chthulucene*. Haraway is no great fan of Lovecraft, for whom Cthulhu is the name of the ultimate monstrosity, at the far reaches of his racist fantasies of the other. Rather, she chose the name because it was given to a species of spider local to her in California. Its curious how the languages of fantasy fiction and scientific classification can criss and cross.

Here is how Haraway further roils the language: "My Chthulucene is the time of mortal compositions at stake to and with each other. This epoch is the *kainos* (-cene) of the ongoing powers that are terra, of the myriad tentacular ones in all their diffracted, webbed temporalities, specialities and materialities. Kainos is the temporality of the thick, lumpy 'now' which is ancient and not." (294) Let me just pick out the word *diffracted* here. This is a scenario populated by many earthy godlets, but whose relations to each other are neither mystically withdrawn nor a theater of representation, but more like waves breaking and ramifying against each other.

It is a way of getting into the world with one's feelers that is a bit aslant to some seemingly similar things. It isn't a *new materialism*, its a quite ancient one. It isn't *posthumanism*, as there never was much to say about the human here. It isn't *ecological*, as there's something a bit off about ecology's obsession with healthy reproduction. It is not quite the *Gaia* of which Isabelle Stengers writes, but a wilder one, from before Hesiod made her a – more or less – respectable God. The Chthulucene is more snake-head Gorgon, one that can even shatter mirrors. "I want to cast in my lot with the ongoing, unfinished, dreadful powers of the Earth, where the risk, terror, and promise of uncategorizable mortal ongoing can still be found..." (288)

Haraway is interested in practices that gather up and make worlds. "I think my proliferating words and figures are flesh and do a lot of things." (277) But it is a non-identity of word and flesh, a resistance to the name that sticks and becomes a fetish, a stand-in, a double. It's a version of the *via negativa* of religious thinkers, but not one aimed at the gesture that marks by its absence where the infinite might be, but rather where the finite might be. This *via negativa* is as injunction to humility that not only refuses representation but also the indexical and the holistic. "You will not come together from two, or many, into one, because that is precisely the idolatry that the negative way tries to block." (279)

This is perhaps a residue of the material semiotics of Catholicism that Haraway might share with Isabelle Stengers, Bruno Latour and Michel Serres. Haraway: "For me, the incarnation and sacramentalism were overwhelmingly about a shared meal, in and of the flesh. Carnality is seriously Catholic. Both cyborgs and dogs, both manifestos, bear witness to that!" (270) In the absence of the Void, the Real, or Name of the Father that might speak the final meaning of things, then there's no end to the slippery co-presence of words and things.

It is a refusal of the structural turn in semiotics, which separates the plane of signification from the plane of things and events to which language refers. In place of which, here is "the extraordinary tentacular closeness of processes of semiosis and fleshiness" (268) Its like a game of rock paper scissors: there's no trump move over all the others; the sign and the hand are inseparable – but not one.

But there's another way to go here, and it leaves its trace in Haraway, in her alternate naming of the Capitalocene and the Chthulucene. The latter might foreground the slippery, fleshy, protean world, but the former still point towards the background, toward more abstract and disembodied figures of totality, particularly of bad totality – one that wills itself to completion and exclusion beyond the moment of disaster. Rather than pluralize the foreground particulars, it might be interesting to pluralize the background generalities. There's the generality of capitalism – if that is still what this mess is – and it forced enclosure of thing after thing in and as the commodity form. But then there's the generality of climate science, the passage of actual molecular flows of carbon through atmosphere and ocean. One can see the dance of particulars as twisting in the violent wind between whatever it is those two abstractions try to name.

The Greeks and the Romans had a series of moon Goddesses: Selene, Phoebe, Artemis, Hecate, Luna and Trivia. Just imagine if the moon shot had been named after Trivia rather than Apollo! She was a goddess of crossroads, whose presence was known only by the barking of dogs. What might an ethics and a politics be like that was a 'secular' version not just of the Chthonic mud gods but also the more ambient ones? The emphasis in Haraway's recent works has been on an ethics for the Chthulucene. But perhaps one needs both an ethics of the Chthulucene and a politics of the Capitalocene, not to mention a political tactic of working with those who call it the Anthropocene.

To start with the ethics, and its questions: How are we all to live in "non-innocence?" (236) And: "How to truly love our age, and also how to somehow live and die well here, with each other?" (207) Perhaps it's a matter of meeting across differences that don't

resolve dialectically, yet don't return to separate enclaves either. "We must engage – must dance – ontological choreography if we are to live and die well with each other in the troubles." (224) Haraway gives it a queer twist: "Make kin not babies!" (224) Which I would rephrase as: make *kith*, not kin! Haraway: "We need other nouns and pronouns for the kin genres of companion species, just as we did (and still do) for the spectrum of genders." (187) Or kith genres, perhaps.

Can an ethics of partial relations scale up to a politics? Or does a politics have to entail, maybe not as an ontology as Chantal Mouffe would have it, but just as a tactic, a agonistic relation to an other? Perhaps we're all up against the Carbon Liberation Front and its take-over of the air and oceans. That is not how Haraway approaches politics, however. "I think an affirmative biopolitics is about finitude, and about living and dying better, living and dying well, and nurturing and killing best we can, in a kind of openness to relentless failing." (227) But this is not so much a biopolitics after Foucault and Agamben, who focus on the politics, so much as out of Lynn Margulis and Evelyn Hutchinson, who focused on the biology. Hence it doesn't fixate on the power to kill or the otherness of death. "Death is not the problem but cutting the tissue of ongoing-ness is the problem." (232)

In its affirmative mode, this might be a politics of pleasure lived publicly, coming from queer activism. In a less fun mode, this might be about confronting biopolitics as "the violence of making live when the possibility of living well is actively blocked." (229) Here Haraway connects to Judith Butler's category of that which can be grieved, but rather more broadly, extended beyond human bodies throughout the connections among the living and dying.

Climate change effects various worlds very unevenly. Some things adapt slowly, some quickly, even too quickly. Questions of what to let live or let die, make live or make die are pressing. What exactly does it mean to call something an *invasive* species? Haraway: "this question of ecosystem assemblages is the name of the game of life on Earth. Period." (249) Politics might not be, or might not just be, a matter of critique of some abstract thing, but also "affirmative relations to worlding." (265)

Politics in Haraway is always connected to "... learning to compose possible ongoing-ness inside relentlessly diffracting worlds. And we need resolutely to keep cosmopolitical practices going here, focusing on those practices that can build a common-enough world." (288) The key words here include caring and learning, but also diffracting. "All of us who care about recuperation, partial connections, and resurgence must learn to live and die in the entanglements of the tentacular without always seeking to cut and bind everything in our way." (295)

Looking back on the 'Companion Species Manifesto', from the point of view of the Cthulucene, it seems to me as a text structured around an allegory. It's about love between dogs and humans, who are kith but not kin. Its not love as perfect unity, symmetry, identity, or purity – those residues of the old patriarchal sky god. "Besides, you never have a correct love, because love is always inappropriate, never proper, never clean..." (275)

While others try to rethink what liberty or equality might mean today, to the extent that Haraway remains within the undead matrix of modern euro-thought, its about fraternity. Or what might possibly go in its place when not only God the father is dead, but so too are the human brothers who thought they could think the world and order it in his place. Hence the word *companion*: "We are companions, *cum panis*, at table together. We are those who are at risk to each other, who are each other's flesh, who eat and are eaten, and who get indigestion..." (215) Companion species "make each other up, in the flesh." (94) They are also *kith*, with its nebulous senses of the friend, neighbor, local, and the customary. Companion species eat together, parasite off each other, eat each other, but also collude and collaborate with each other.

*Species* might be more nominal than real. It's a word with several senses. In biology it means gene flow, selection, variation, population. But there's an older sense of the word, going back to Thomas Aquinas, where a species is a *generic*, a series of abstract forms, through which to define differences. The two senses collide in something like the practice of dog-breeding, where the *genetic* is made to yield the *generic*, the breed. "discourses of pure blood and nobility haunt modern breeds like the undead." (160)

Species might also, after Marx and Freud, refer to something more abstract, and touching on the totality again: *specie* as gold and as shit, and a general economy in which the human as species-being might be multiply implicated. But Haraway always pulls the reader back from a too quick flight to the abstract. Her concepts and figures are about finitude, impurity, historicity, complexity, cohabitation, coevolution, and cross species solidarity.

In a delightful *détournement* of Althusser, Haraway asks if maybe animals hail us as we hail them into our constructs of nature and culture. Maybe Althusser's *interpellation* works not just on humans, calling them into ideological and imaginary relations to their real relations, but animals as well. If a human knows itself as itself when called, and becomes a subject of that call – maybe a dog does too. And then what about when a doggy bark calls a human? And perhaps, over a very long time, it becomes a kind of *metaplastm*, a remodeling of dog and human flesh, not in each other's image, but differentially, bouncing off each other's abilities and needs. What if that human and dog relation, including all its abuse, was an allegory for multispecies life more generally?

There are both dog stories and dog histories here. The stories are about dogs Haraway knows personally; the history is about the how those kinds of dogs came to be in America. The former has some queer dog sex-pleasures and lots about how dogs and humans train each other. The dog stories are about dogs and humans training each other for the sport of agility, where the human guides the dog through a series of obstacles. These are stories about respect and trust, not 'unconditional love' between humans and dogs. It is about non-symmetrical relations that don't turn the animal into a surrogate human. Its about "situated

partial connection." (140) Dog and handler reaching for excellence as concrete beings, not abstractions.

The history has multiple actors, including dogs, coyotes, wolves, government departments, ranchers, scientists, and dog-breeders. Both at the particular and the historical level, species shape each other through flexible and opportunistic moves. "Relationship is multiform, at stake, unfinished, consequential." (122) It is not just a matter of Man subordinating Nature to His will, as both techno-optimists and – weirdly – deep ecologists – both seem to believe.

Haraway is resistant to seeing historical actors of any species as raw materials for capital or empire, but maybe sometimes the dense net of relations or figures in the foreground crowds out the background. One could retain the commitment to narrating history as co-history, in which the narrator is always implicated, while painting in more of scenery. "Again and again in my manifesto, I and my people need to learn to inhabit histories, not disown them, least of all through the cheap tricks of puritanical critique." (181) I can't really speak for the Puritans, but if I could, I might point out the irony of an inclusiveness that requires excluding us to make its point about including everything else.

Not that the abstract ground is absent from Haraway. It's just that when she writes of love, it's about particulars; when she writes of rage, it's about the abstract. What might be interesting would be to complete the semiotic square: to find points of rage among the particular; and even a difficult love of the abstract. The abstract, and rage, come together in the figure of the cyborg. "Care, flourishing, differences in power, scale of time – these matter for cyborgs. For example, what kind of temporal scale-making could shape labor systems, investment strategies, and consumption patterns in which the generation time of information machines became compatible with the generation times of human, animal, and plant communities and ecosystems?" (113)

The companion species text puts the stress on situated partial connections. The 'Manifesto for Cyborgs' leans a little more on imagined totalities. The latter are still situated, they just tune in to the background of a situation rather than the foreground. The temptation to resist is seeing the imagined totality as a ground in the sense of an ontology, as if it were something prior to the situation. It is rather something secondary and speculative.

The cyborg appears as an everyday figure, an aspect of women's experience, one might also say of the experience of labor. The more common way to imagine the cyborg is as the other, as that which infiltrates, against which the human fights a border war to preserve its essence. We are supposed to imagine we are Deckard the bladerunner, cutting the inhuman from the human, but perhaps we are all Rachel the replicant, laminated aggregates to flesh and tech: "we are all chimeras." (7) So perhaps we could assume the pleasure and responsibility of life and love among confusing boundaries.

Among other things, this is a choice between genres. It means letting go of narratives in which the decoy or the infiltrator is exposed, leading to a restoration of lost wholeness. No more Eden: "the cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence." (9) It is implicated in troubling boundaries between the human and the animal, the organic and the machinic, and between matter and information.

Haraway stays close to the slippage zones between two perspectives, one about bodies, one about relations. She does not completely flip the script and subordinate bodies to relations. What if we did for a bit? Not in a moralizing or critical genre, but a speculative and ironic one? That's one of the things going on in 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs' that is less common in Haraway's later work, but which has its uses all the same.

Haraway: "Advanced capitalism' is inadequate to convey the structure of this historical moment." (27) It was a bold and prescient claim. "I argue for a politics rooted in claims about fundamental changes in the nature of class, race, and gender in an emerging system of world order analogous in its novelty and scope to that created by industrial capitalism." (28) It has implications for both narrating the form of the bad totality and for seeding terms within which to make alliances in and against it that might tend towards a more habitable one.

"From one perspective, a cyborg world is about the final imposition of a grid of control on the planet. From another perspective, a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints. The political struggle is the will to see from both perspectives at once." (15) Or rather four perspectives: the uninhabitable particular and general; the habitable particular and general.

There's more to it than the good particulars against the bad totality. Particularly in an era in which the particulars themselves became the form of the bad totality itself: "we risk lapsing into boundless difference and giving up on the confusing task of making partial, real connection. Some differences are playful; some are poles of world historical systems of domination. 'Epistemology' is about knowing the difference." (27) One might add: some situated speculations on the totality might be part of domination; some might not.

Haraway does a good job of playing across the boundaries that structure certain enervating habits of thought, but there is one terminological duality I think might be worth bringing back into the mix. "The boundary-maintaining images of base and superstructure, public and private, or material and ideal never seemed more feeble." (36) There's a way in which the first of these pairs is not like the others. Thinking about how one is situated in a base or an infrastructure is itself a way of refusing binaries, so long as one keeps the concept of infrastructure open as a question. Maybe we don't even know what's infrastructural in a world

that runs on the information vector as much as it runs on coal mines and blast furnaces. Maybe we don't even know whose labor is implicated in its workings.

The 'Cyborg' text is actually rather good on the emerging infrastructure that I call the vectoral, which monitors boundaries, and measures flows, and manages what Alex Galloway calls *protocol*, which polices what can connect with what. The vectoral is not interested in the integrity of natural objects, as it reaches into objects of all kith or kin, extracts a measure of its value and authorizes connections and disconnections.

The vectoral produces, as a secondary phenomenon, the appearance not only of *objects*, but as Lazzarato shows, also of *subjects*. Haraway was already saying this: "Human beings, like any other component or subsystem, must be localized in a system architecture whose basic modes of operation are probabilistic, statistical." (32) Not just bodies but situations are subordinated to the vector. Home, work, market, public, body, all are traversed by it. It is basically what the military used to call *C-cubed-I*: command, control, communication and information – but for civilians.

Is this still capitalism, or something worse? Haraway was already grappling with a new language for it in 'Cyborg.' Whatever it is, it produces a new worldwide proletariat, new distributions of ethnicity and sexuality, and new forms of the family. Haraway was writing about an earlier moment in Silicon Valley, when it was still a major center for chip fabrication, using mostly women of color as an industrial workforce. As Andrew Ross shows, much of that production has moved on, leaving toxic superfund sites behind, but the global, distributed labor of making these digital means of production still exists, on an expanded and globalized scale.

The word *precarity* had not yet been coined, but Haraway was already describing it. Work has in a paradoxical way been feminized. On the one hand, women get to work; on the other, the work is precarious, powerless, and toxic. The vector has the ability to route around any stoppage or strike that workers might deploy as leverage. "The success of the attack on relatively privileged, mostly white, men's unionized jobs is tied to the power of the new communication technologies to integrate and control labor despite extensive dispersion and decentralization." (39)

Haraway identified some important symptoms of this world, including its "bimodal social structure" or what we now call inequality. (44) Not least for women workers. Then there's the "permanent high-tech military establishment." (42). Or what we now call the surveillance state. It spawns an ideology that is in part "sociobiological origin stories." (43) Now mixed with Ayn Rand. The limited vision of this world, as Haraway already notes, could already be found best expressed in the form of the video game. In *Gamer Theory* I added that so too are some of its possibilities. The electric mega-church might now be the Oxycontin of the people.

Haraway: "most Marxisms see domination best." (50) They are less good about everyday life. But rather than subsume all the bad signs under the a kind of totalizing pessimism, it helps at the same time to work on a "subtle understanding of emerging pleasures, experiences and powers." (51) Dialectics may be a dream language rather than a magic key to the Real. But perhaps if one knows it's a dream, the speculative and totalizing vision can have its uses. Haraway mostly find this in utopian science fiction, but maybe theory can offer some of the same situated perspective on the useful and harmful, the foreground and background, without collapsing everything into one of those four quadrants of ways of thinking and feeling.

Haraway opts for a cyborg politics of noise and pollution, but I think that's only one of the tactical styles. In a world enclosed by the vector as a gamespace, a cyborg can be a player, a spoilsport, a cheat, but also a trifter. One can accept the rules and the goal. One can refuse the rules and the goal, one can accept the goal but not the rules, and one can accept the rules but not the goals.

Each of those tactics can do with some shareware terms, concepts, stories, affect: "race, gender, and capital require a cyborg theory of wholes and parts. There is no drive in cyborgs to produce total theory, but there is an intimate experience of boundaries, their construction and deconstruction." (66) Maybe that's just one mode. One can think ambivalent boundaries or one can think ambivalent vectors. Maybe cyborgs also write total theory butt take it lightly. A good fact is mostly true, about something in particular; a good theory is *slightly true* about a bunch of things.

Hence when Haraway says "the production of universal, totalizing theory is a major mistake.." one can separate totalizing from universal. (67) As Henri Lefebvre proposed, to totalize can be a situated act that knows it isn't universal, which comes into friendly or agonistic relations with other totalizations. Relations between particulars are partly made out of particular articulations, but also out of the more or less playful encounter of broader worldviews. Everyone works outwards from where they are and what they do to toward the absolute.

What Alexander Bogdanov called *tektology* is the sharing, comparing and testing of component parts between worldviews generated in particular situations. All we have to agree on is a shared task of making a possibly livable world. We don't even have to agree to forego a grand confrontation with the world, which for those of us who are temperamentally 'protestant', isn't going to happen anyway.

It seems vital in the Chthulucene that the shared task of making a possibly livable world include those who work in the natural sciences, and who tend to have the worldviews that grow outward from those kinds of labors. Haraway: "taking responsibility for the social relations of science and technology means refusing an anti-science metaphysics, a demonology of technology.." (67)

That calls for thinking through what Haraway describes with "the odd circumlocution the social relations of science and

technology..." (37) There was a time when this would not have been odd. The *social relations of science* was a whole movement in the 1930s, started by once-famous Marxist and leftist scientists such as JD Bernal, Joseph Needham and JBS Haldane, but which included also Dorothy Needham, Charlotte Haldane, Dorothy Hodgkin and Kathleen Lonsdale. It did not survive the cold war purges of intellectual life. Science studies has reinvented many of its themes and in many ways improved upon them. Yet perhaps, as Haraway once noted in passing, the "liberal mystification that all started with Thomas Kuhn..." has erased a little too much of its radical past. (69) We are very fortunate that Donna Haraway and her kith reinvented it.

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